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ABSTRACT

In the opinion of decision-making scholars, conflict is a natural component of group decision-making. A new direction for conflict and group decision-making theory and research will help dispel the confusion as to the promotive or disruptive nature of disagreement in group decision-making. Conflict literature is replete with descriptions of the strategies and tactics available to individuals engaging in interpersonal conflict. Theory building in this area requires answers to questions about the strategies and tactics most employed by decision-making groups, and the identification of new strategies and tactics, for example: (1) What strategies and tactics do decision-making groups use to manage disagreements? (2) Are there strategies or tactics for disagreement management in groups other than those discussed in existing conflict literature? and (3) What is the relationship between strategies and decision quality? While much has been gained from the study of cooperative and competitive climates, work habits, and the like as they relate to conflict, important questions remain. Extant research has failed to explain the positive or negative effects of conflict, nor has it revealed anything of the natural responses to disagreement. (Thirty-six references are attached.) (RS)

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Conflict and Group Decision-Making: A New Approach

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Conflict and Group Decision-Making: A New Approach

Whether serving on municipal, state or federal task forces, public or private sector committees, group decision-makers carry a tremendous burden. They are required to weigh multiple alternatives, predict outcomes and select the most appropriate solution. They must do this with information that may be adequate, overabundant, insufficient, contradictory and/or provided by less than credible sources. Further, there are interpersonal concerns that need attention during the decision-making process. Some members aspire to be leaders, others are concerned with impression management, and yet others vie for plum assignments and duties.

Janis and Mann (1977) explain that decision-making is the requirement to choose among alternative courses of action, involving search, deliberation, and selection procedures (p. 21). Similarly, Gouran (1982b) defines decision-making as the act of choosing among a set of clear alternatives under conditions that necessitate choice (p. 3). Gouran explains that decisions are not made without reason. He introduces the concept of consequential decision-making, defined as a process of systematic inquiry prompted by the conflict arising from the uncertainty of the implications of alternative choices in situations demanding choice (p. 5).

This discussion of decision-making reveals an underlying component of the process--conflict. Gouran (1982b) identifies conflict as a natural occurrence resulting from having to predict the unknown. Decision-making groups are expected to select the most appropriate alternative without complete certainty that the

selected alternative is truly the best choice. In this situation, there is a two-fold potential for conflict to arise as a result of information. First, there may be too much or too little of it. In the case of the former, information overload may develop so that members lack the capacities to interpret, analyze, and understand all that is available. The latter would limit the group's ability to understand the task and make thoughtful proposals. Second, information may be contradictory. In such cases, members must determine what to believe and develop criteria for making such decisions.

George (1974) discusses psychological tension due to the cognitive complexities involved in the decision-making process. He points out that considerable stress is evoked in a decision-maker attempting to work out a good solution. These decisional conflicts involve the simultaneous opposing tendencies within an individual or group to accept or reject a given course of action (Janis & Mann, 1977). While George (1974) attributes these conflicts to cognitive complexities (for example, stress to make a quick decision and information overload), Janis and Mann (1977) identify additional sources of stress in decision-making including profound threats to the decision-maker's social status and self esteem. Bormann and Bormann (1988) discuss leadership emergence as another source of conflict in groups.

It appears that decision-making scholars agree that conflict is an inevitable part of the decision-making process. No matter the level--individual, dyadic, group or organizational--the process of weighing alternatives, evaluating and searching for

information in an effort to make the most appropriate choice or decision, involves conflict. The conceptualizations of decision-making (Gouran, 1982b; Janis & Mann, 1977) add support to the notion that conflict is a natural occurrence in this process. Hence, conflict is present in most decision-making groups.

Current Conflict Conceptualizations

Before attempting to explain the role of conflict in group decision-making, discussion of the term conflict is required. This section examines various definitions offered for the concept of conflict. Although these definitions share many common themes, there also is disagreement and contradiction:

> Conflict is a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate rivals (Coser, 1956);
>
> Conflict arises from scarcity of positions and resources; involves at least two parties engaged in an interaction composed of opposing actions and counteractions; behavior that is intended to thwart, injure, annihilate or otherwise control the opposition, thus enabling the contending parties to gain at each others' expense; involves the acquisition or exercise of power (Mack & Snyder, 1957):
>
> Conflict is a situation of competition in which parties are aware of the incompatibilities of positions that more than one party wishes to hold. Using this approach, conflict is viewed as part of the broader concept of competition (Boulding, 1973); and,
>
> Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards and interference from the other party in achieving their goals (Hocker & Wilmot, 1985).

Although these definitions share many components--struggle, incompatible goals, scarce rewards and resources--there are some areas in which the overlap is less apparent and, in some instances, non-existent. First, there are scholars who identify

resolution strategies as necessarily harmful to one or both of the parties (Jandt, 1973; Deutsch, 1973; and Mack & Snyder, 1957). Others (Hocker & Wilmot, 1985; and Katz & Lawyer, 1985) suggest that the resolution of conflict is not necessarily hazardous to the parties involved.

This is particularly problematic when exploring the type of conflict present in decision-making. When the goal is to reach the most appropriate decision, conflict can take the form of processing contradictory, incomplete, incorrect information; or of dealing with opposing opinions and personalities. This is not to say that harm to one of the parties (status or prestige loss) is not possible. Rather, it is to suggest that annihilation of other members is not the sole or even primary focus of conflict or conflict resolution in decision-making. Further, in intragroup decision-making the goal of members is to come up with a choice that the majority of group members accept. The group decision-making process requires that individual members combine efforts to reach a "group" decision. Although this may not always happen, the presence of a group working together reduces and limits harmful conflict of this type.

Second, and closely related to the first point, is the portrayal of conflict as negative. Intentions to thwart, injure or annihilate (Mack & Snyder, 1957) others do not create pleasant images. Hocker and Wilmot (1985) point out that conflict is often thought of as destructive, threatening, painful, and hopeless. These scholars, as well as Folger and Poole (1984), suggest that dealing with conflict is not automatically a

repulsive activity. Rather, they argue that conflict is neither positive nor negative. Positive and negative values are attached to the concept when actors opt to manage the conflict negatively or positively. Conflict management can have favorable as well as unfavorable effects. Hence, conflict also may be thought of as exciting, strengthening, helpful, stimulating, clarifying, and opportune (Hocker & Wilmot, 1985).

Clearly, the conflict concept has been discussed in great detail by a variety of scholars representing several fields. Unfortunately, these discussions fail to cover completely the type of conflict present in decision-making. They fail to get at the uncertainty and problems with information that can occur in decision-making. Further, most of the current conceptualizations ignore the role of communication in conflict.

Group Conflict: Another Look

If we are to understand conflict as it is manifested in the decision-making arena, it is necessary to sculpt yet another definition--one that encompasses decision-making. Further, it is important to develop a definition that recognizes communication as the manner in which conflict is created, managed, perceived, and resolved (Hocker & Wilmot, 1985).

Deutsch (1973) and Hocker and Wilmot (1985) identify two important elements of conflict which are essential to its definition. The first, interdependence, refers to mutual dependence of the parties involved. Logically, a conflict does not exist, or at least lacks force or importance, if those involved are not required to interact (or at least have the

option to refuse/avoid interaction), give and take, reward or withhold rewards. Conflict requires interaction that is calculated and reflects acknowledgment, interpretation of preceding actions, and forecasts of others' future actions. A person who is not dependent upon another--that is, who has no special interest in what the other does--has no conflict with that other person (Braiker & Kelley, 1979). Hence, the parties must be dependent upon one another for the continuation, management, and resolution of conflict.

The second element, "expressed struggle" (Hocker & Wilmot, 1985) or action (Deutsch, 1973), is important for the study of conflict from a communication perspective. Conflicts exist when the parties involved agree in some way that the behaviors associated with their relationship are 'conflict' behaviors (Jandt, 1973). It is impossible to have conflict without either verbal or nonverbal communication or both (Hocker and Wilmot, 1985):

> The expression may be subtle, but it must be present for the activity to be conflict. . . . Often, the communicative behavior is easily identified with conflict, such as when one party openly disagrees with the other. Other times, however, an interpersonal conflict may be operating at a more tacit level. Two friends, for instance, may both be avoiding the other and aware that they are engaging in avoidance because both think, "I don't want to see him (sic) for a few days because of what he did." The interpersonal struggle is being expressed by avoidance. . . . Most expressed struggles have a "triggering event" (Walton, 1969). When the worker says, "I don't like my job" to his boss, the wife stays out late, or the teenager says, "Why do you always pick on me?" such events are often triggering events. While a conflict is often over issues that are longer lasting than the triggering event, the event makes it clear to all that an expressed struggle is occurring. However, the triggering event is not, by itself, the conflict.

Hence, any definition of conflict adopting a communication view should include interdependence and expressed struggle. The Hocker and Wilmot (1985) definition offers a starting point from which a definition of decision-making conflict is developed. Decision-making conflict involves an expressed struggle resulting from cognitive complexities or inadequate and insufficient information, time, knowledge, ability or skills necessary to select an appropriate option. It also may develop as a result of contradictory information. In dyadic and group situations, it also includes interpersonal struggles between interdependent parties stemming from leadership emergence, unequal work distribution, and popularity differences (Bormann & Bormann, 1988).

Conflict Episodes in Group Decision-Making

The primary manifestation of conflict in this setting is disagreement. That is, during discussions of the merits of ideas, alternatives, objectives, and policies, group members differ. These differences are usually expressed verbally. Further, decision-making conflict is present episodically during group discussions. In other words, disagreements that occur during the group decision-making process do so in periods of sustained disagreement characterized by opposing viewpoints on an issue facing the group. These episodes are not disruptions but are natural components of the group decision-making process. This claim requires further explanation. An examination of disagreement episode components reveals the nature of conflict episodes in groups. Key indicators of the disagreement episode

include "sustained disagreement" and "issue." Sustained disagreement indicates that there is an initial statement that spurs a second response which opposes or differs with it. In order for the discussion to be viewed as a disagreement episode, the response must be expressed via oral communication. Further, disagreement episodes require at least two additional statements. The third and fourth statements, as well as any subsequent remarks, may come from the originator of the discussion or any other group member. These statements can take one of several forms--rebuttal, additional information, or confirming communication. The issues over which the group is in conflict may include, but are not limited to, the decision facing the group, procedures for decision-making, division of responsibilities, leadership, consequences of alternatives, and validity of information. The inclusion of "issue" in this definition of disagreement episode indicates that these segments are topical. Hence, a single disagreement episode ends when the issue under discussion changes. The shift in topic may be due to the resolution of the disagreement.

Again, this specification of disagreement episodes is important due to its exclusivity. The purpose is not to come up with yet another conceptualization of conflict. Rather, the idea is to define one form of conflict--that which is present during group decision-making. Scholars studying interpersonal conflict, negotiation and bargaining, organizations and politics have developed definitions for the type of conflict present in those situations. The definitions were necessary to conduct research. It is logical to assume that a distinction must be made for

decision-making conflict as well.

Another justification for this new conceptualization is that it includes communication (Hocker & Wilmot, 1985). As Hocker and Wilmot (1985) explain, it is through communication that conflict is produced, manifested, recognized, and resolved. Unfortunately, most definitions of conflict fail to recognize the instrumental role of communication.

Exploring the Conflict and Decision-making Link

The preceding section established that conflict is a component of most decision-making. This section (1) discusses the dilemma about the positive or negative effects conflict is believed to have on the decision-making group and (2) suggests that group members may attempt to manage disagreements.

A major issue in the research linking conflict and group decision-making is its failure to respond to the question of the effect of conflict on decision-making groups. Despite agreement concerning the natural presence of conflict in the decision-making process, there is little consensus as to its effect. Pondy (1967), for example, illustrates the concerns expressed by some conflict theorists who contend conflict has deleterious effects. Chief among these negative outcomes is disequilibrium. These researchers explain that prior to conflict, groups have reached equilibrium or are trying to achieve this goal. Once disagreements emerge, equilibrium, or the potential to reach it, is destroyed. Bonner (1959) suggests that conflict can lead to the formation of subgroups or cliques which reduce the integrative nature of the group. When these cliques withdraw

from group activities, the group loses strength, skill, knowledge, and input that these members could contribute. Finally, Blake and Mouton (1962) contend that when conflict is present, individuals focus on their own concerns and interests. This self-absorption often results in the inability to attend fully to others (Blake & Mouton, 1962).

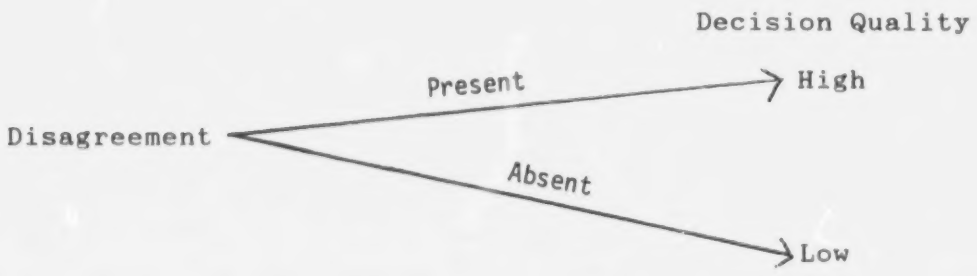
Deutsch (1973) counters by claiming that conflict prevents stagnation, stimulates interest and curiosity, is the medium through which problems can be discussed and solutions arrived at, and is the root of personal and social change (p. 9). He sees conflict as the enabling force that establishes group identity and cohesiveness. Finally, Coser (1956) suggests that conflict facilitates change and readjustment by binding antagonists (p. 121):

> Conflict may initiate other types of interaction between antagonists. It also usually takes place within a universe of norms prescribing the forms in which it is to be carried out. Conflicts act as a stimulus for establishing new rules, norms, and institutions, thus serving as an agent of socialization. Furthermore, conflict reaffirms dormant norms and thus intensifies participation.

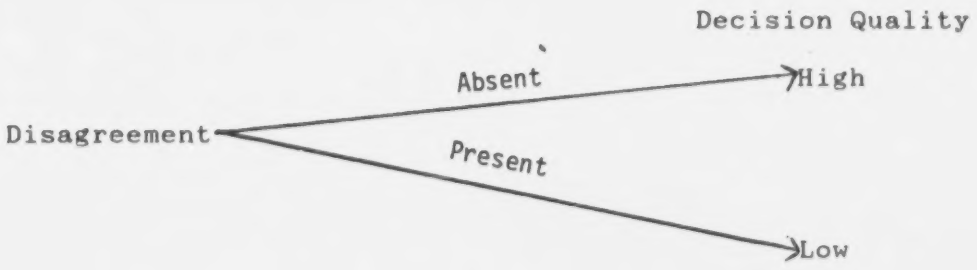
As illustrated, scholars are at odds as to whether conflict has positive or negative effects on groups. Researchers on both sides of the issue suggest that group goals, or outcomes, are affected when conflict is present. One of the objectives of group research is to understand the decision-making process. Numerous group decision-making researchers (Hackman, 1969; Bell, 1974, 1979; Hackman & Morris, 1975; Hirokawa, 1980) focus on the processes leading to high and low quality decisions. Hence, the appropriate question for scholars linking conflict and group

decision-making is: what effect does conflict have on the quality of group decisions? Depending upon the the response to this question, one of two models is appropriate for explaining the relationship between the two concepts:

Model 1



Model 2



Model 1 suggests the facilitative aspects of conflict as proposed by Deutsch (1973) and Coser (1956). Here, disagreements are viewed as outlets for the expression of differences. If the first model is accepted, it can be concluded that the presence of disagreement gives group members the opportunity to discuss concerns and attempt to come to a shared understanding of the issues facing the group, as well as possible alternatives and their respective consequences. The second model illustrates the negative effects of conflict. Here, disagreements stimulate

polarity, and resentment and discourage parties from considering other opinions. Research exploring the relationship between conflict and decision quality is required to determine which of these models is valid.

Several scholars have offered descriptions of the strategies open to those involved in conflict. The most common typology of individual conflict strategies consists of five options (Katz & Lawyer, 1985; Folger & Poole, 1984; and Hocker & Wilmot, 1985):

> 1. Collaboration. The collaborator's approach to conflict is to manage it by maintaining interpersonal relationships and ensuring that both parties to the conflict achieve their personal goals. The collaborator acts not only on behalf of his or her self-interest but on behalf of the opposing party's interests as well. This is a win/win posture, in which both the collaborator's stance toward conflict management and that of the other party are win.
>
> 2. Compromise. The compromiser's approach to conflict is to assume that a win/win solution is not possible and adopt a negotiating stance that involves a little bit of winning and a little bit of losing with respect to both the goals and the relationships of the involved parties, with persuasion and manipulation dominating the style.
>
> 3. Accommodation. The accommodator's approach to conflict involves maintaining the interpersonal relationship at all cost, with little or no concern for the personal goals of the parties involved. Giving in, appeasing, and avoiding conflict are viewed as ways of protecting the relationship. The accommodator's stance is to yield-lose, allowing the other to win.
>
> 4. Control. The controller's approach to conflict is to take the necessary steps to ensure that his or her personal goals are met, whatever the cost to the relationship involved. Conflict is viewed as a win or lose proposition, with winning somehow equated with status and competence. This is a power-oriented mode in which you use whatever power seems appropriate to win your own position, defend a position which you believe is correct, or simply attempt to win.

5. Avoidance. The avoider's approach to conflict is to view it as something to be shunned at all costs. A central theme to the style is hopelessness, which results in a high degree of frustration for all parties involved. Personal goals are usually not met, nor is the interpersonal relationship maintained in this style of conflict. It might take the form of diplomatically diverting an issue, postponing an issue until a better time, or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation. This is a leave-lose/win posture, in which the avoider's stance toward conflict management is to leave-lose, allowing the other to win. (Katz & Lawyer, 1985, pp. 95-96)

Finally, Sillars (1980) groups responses to conflict in three categories with their respective tactics (p. 188):

I. Passive and Indirect strategies (No direct discussion of the problem takes place.)
   A. Nonstrategies (Discussion is perceived to be unnecessary.)
      1. Letting the issue resolve itself. The problem either disappears or is expected to without any active attempt to resolve it.
      2. Empathic adjustment. Understanding develops between the parties and the problem is resolved without explicit attempts to communicate.
      3. Disregarding the issue. The problem is dismissed as unimportant.
   B. Avoidance strategies (Discussion is avoided to minimize negative reactions from the partner.)
      4. Avoiding the issue. The problem is tolerated to avoid negative reactions from the partner.
      5. Avoiding the person. The partner is avoided, communication is minimized, or the relationship is terminated to avoid conflict.
   C. Indirect strategies (The actor communicates indirectly. There is no explicit acknowledgment that a problem exists.)
      6. Hinting. Indicating perceptions and feelings through nonverbal communication and indirect comments only.
      7. Setting an example. The partner is expected to observe and imitate the actor's own behavior.
      8. Joking. The problem is discussed jokingly. The actor does not disclose actual feelings of concern or irritation. The problem is made to seem less serious than the actor perceives it to be.

D. Submissive strategies

9. Yielding. Passively complying without providing input to the solution of the problem.
10. Submissive emotion. An emotional display which indicates weakness and passivity, such as crying or acting hurt or sick.

II. Distributive Strategies (Explicit acknowledgment and discussion of conflict which seeks concessions from the partner.)

A. Noncoercive compliance-gaining

11. Requesting. It is simply suggested or requested that the partner change his/her behavior. There is little elaboration or disclosure.
12. Demanding. Same as requesting except that the request is assertive or aggressive. A negative evaluation of the partner is stated or implied.
13. Persuading. The partner is given reasons for complying. The appeal attempts to change outlook, as well as behavior.

B. Coercive compliance-gaining

14. Aggressive emotion. Emotional behavior that is directed against the partner to gain compliance (e.g., insults, slurs, profanity, yelling or anger).
15. Threat-aversion. Punishment is threatened or carried out for failure to comply.

III. Integrative Strategies (Explicit acknowledgment and discussion of conflict which sustains a neutral evaluation of the partner and does not seek concessions.)

16. Disclosure. The actor provides and elicits information to facilitate understanding of perceptions, feelings, and reasons for behavior. No attempt is made to explore alternative solutions to the problem. The problem may be viewed purely as a misunderstanding or the parties may "agree to disagree."
17. Problem-solving. Same as disclosure except the actor shows a willingness to consider alternative solutions to the problem that are mutually acceptable.

These strategies and tactics suggest that individuals select what they believe to be the most appropriate methods or messages to deal with disputes with others. It is logical to expect that

decision-making groups utilize certain strategies unique to the decision-making process.

Review of Literature

With the theoretical framework for the study of conflict in group decision-making established, it is important to examine studies linking conflict to group decision-making performance. That is the focus of this section. Much of the work in group decision-making conflict is deterministic. Deterministic approaches view conflict and decision outcomes as products of such structural variables as cooperative-competitive climates, decision rules, and work habits (Putnam, 1986). Studies in this area treat communication as a variable that determines decision outcomes or intervenes between conflict and group outcomes (Putnam, 1986). Group outcomes, in terms of decision quality, are the focus here.

Cooperative and Competitive Climates

In his pioneering study of conflict, Deutsch (1949) examined the effects of cooperative and competitive climates. Climate refers to the prevailing mood, atmosphere, or outlook of a group--that is, the composite of attitudes toward the group (Putnam, 1986). Participants in the Deutsch (1949) study were instructed to either cooperate or compete with other groups to solve several problems over the course of a semester. In addition to finding that cooperative groups worked together more frequently, the research discovered these groups solved problems more rapidly than their competitive counterparts. Cooperative groups surpassed competitive teams in quantity of product and

quality of discussion. That is, these groups wrote longer, well-thought-out summaries of their solutions; came up with more fruitful ideas for handling the problem (p. 220); and showed more insight and understanding of the nature of the problem being posed to them (p. 221) than competitive groups. Additionally, Deutsch (1949) reports that cooperative groups showed more of the following characteristics than did competitive groups: coordination of efforts; diversity in amount of contributions per member; sub-division of activity; achievement pressure; attentiveness to fellow members; mutual comprehension of communication; common appraisals of communication; orientation and orderliness; friendliness during discussions; favorable evaluation of the group and its products; and incorporation of the attitude of the generalized other (p. 230). Although competitive groups produced good ideas, they were usually the product of individual group members rather than efforts of the group as a whole.

Blau (1954) studied differences between two groups of interviewers in an employment agency. Cooperative workers helped one another with the processing and placement of clients while competitive group members served applicants on an individualistic basis. Competitive workers showed high levels of suspicion of, and competition with, co-workers (Blau, 1954). Cooperative groups were more productive and cohesive than competitive groups. Blau (1954) concludes that a cooperative climate facilitates effective group communication which enhances productivity.

In a study conducted 20 years later, Baird (1974) examined

the degree of structure emerging in both cooperative and competitive group discussions. Specifically, the researcher sought to assess the distributional structure present in the cooperative and competitive discussions by comparing the number of participants' statements falling into each of five categories (initiates and develops themes; expresses agreement; expresses disagreement; gives information; and asks for information) with their expected frequency of occurrence (p. 229). Baird also studied the sequential structure of statements with sequential structure defined as the relative predictability of the category of the second of a pair of statements when the category of the first statement is known (p. 229). The research revealed that competitive groups initiated new themes and expressed disagreement almost twice as often as cooperative groups. In cooperative groups, members agreed more often and made proportionally more statements giving information in an apparent effort to contribute to the performance of the group as a whole (p. 231). Baird (1974) reports that statements initiating and developing a theme were followed more often by expressions of agreement and requests for information and less often by statements giving information than one would expect on the basis of the overall distribution of the sample. Expressions of disagreement in competitive groups were followed more often than expected by other statements in the same category (p. 231). In cooperative discussions, statements expressing disagreement were followed more often by requests for information and further expressions of disagreement, and less often by statements initiating and developing a theme or giving information (p. 232).

Baird suggests that cooperative group members feel a need to resolve whatever conflict arises, for in no instance was an expression of disagreement followed by a change of topic. In accord with Deutsch (1949), Baird reports that cooperative groups show greater diversity in the number of contributions, send more relevant messages, make more attempts to influence members, and project more friendliness and attentiveness than competitive teams.

In a related study, Donohue, Hawes, and Mabee (1981) expanded Baird's (1974) work, applying a structural-functional system and expanding to ten the set of possible content categories used to analyze communicative components (p. 135). Findings reveal that cooperative group members structure their decision-making through a sequence of requesting, providing, and supporting information. When disagreements arise, they take the form of ambiguous statements concerning group goals and clarifying tentative decisions.

In sum, these studies indicate that competitive and cooperative groups differ in the way in conflict is handled. Cooperative groups produce more thorough proposals, resolve disagreements rather than avoid them, permit greater member participation, understand the issues at hand, and function in a more friendly atmosphere than their competitive counterparts. Although competitive groups generate good ideas during discussion, the ideas are introduced in suspicious climates. These studies are important in that they demonstrate that the way groups manage conflict has an effect on the final product.

However, there are some limitations in the competitive-cooperative research. Climate research appears to offer a prescription for communication in decision-making groups: communicate and communicate often. Work in cooperative-competitive climates is misleading. At first glance, it would appear that continuous communication leads to a decrease in the presence of conflict. Putnam (1986) explains that this leads investigators to presume that more communication facilitates cooperation, and cooperation automatically opens channels of communication (p. 181). In an examination of the research conducted in communication and conflict, Hawes and Smith (1973) report that several scholars are guilty of making just this claim--more communication equals less conflict. Hawes and Smith (1973) suggest that we should question the proposition that as the amount of communication increases, consensus is more likely to be reached. The notion that "the more we talk, the more we agree" is rooted in the belief that conflict is the result of insufficient or ineffective communication (Hawes and Smith, 1973). Hence, if conflict occurs because of ineffective communication, its resolution must involve more effective communication. Hawes and Smith (1973) conclude that there is not sufficient evidence to warrant the assumption that "the more we talk, the more we agree." Putnam (1986) agrees that the relationship between communication and conflict is more complex than suggested by this statement and concludes that focusing on the cooperative-competitive dimension may hinder understanding of how climates evolve from communication and how group interaction shapes climates.

Another problem with existing research is its reliance on intergroup rather than intragroup conflict and the instructions given these groups to either cooperate or compete. Although conflicts may arise between groups, they are also likely to develop within groups. Cooperative-competitive research does not provide information about the conflict process within decision-making groups. Further, instructing groups to interact in a particular manner reveals little of the natural presence of conflict and its effects on decision quality. Rather, these results indicate the quality of decision reached when groups are instructed to interact in a particular manner.

One further problem with the cooperative-competitive continuum is its exclusion of other strategies. Although the researchers cited above view cooperation and competition as climate, they can also be studied in terms of conflict resolution strategies. Clearly, competition and cooperation are two of several options available to those involved in a struggle. The problem is that there are likely to be additional strategies available to groups experiencing decision-making conflict. Reliance on two, researcher-imposed strategies offers information that is less than complete. Other strategies, like avoidance, compromise, and accommodation, are also possible but have not been included in this research.

Group Work Habits

Work habits constitute another focus of the deterministic approach to conflict in group decision-making. These habits include norms for task behavior, leadership directives,

discussion procedures, and decision rules (Putnam, 1986). They form the framework that encompasses decision emergence; that is, they establish norms and rules for the way topics are discussed and decisions reached (Putnam, 1986, p. 181). It is common for groups dealing with conflict to return to past practices which may or may not be appropriate for the conflict (Folger & Poole, 1984). Putnam (1986) explains that these work habits are a form of "trained incapacity," one that is usually maladaptive to the group's needs (p. 181):

> For example, one group may run its meetings by voting on issues and relying on majority rule to reach decisions. But, if members polarize into factions, the very act of voting may escalate a conflict, especially if the minority feels disenfranchised. Thus, work habits must be adapted to the nature of the disagreement.

Three types of conflict are related to work habits: substantive, affective, and procedural. The first, substantive, consists of disagreements or differences of opinion with ideas about the group task. One might expect much substantive conflict when the members in a group are task-oriented, striving to achieve group goals (Guetzkow & Gyr, 1954, p. 309).

Affective, the second type of conflict related to work habits, includes controversies of personal clashes, self-oriented needs, and the emotional aspects of interpersonal relations (Guetzkow & Gyr, 1954; Putnam, 1986). This type of conflict is more likely when members use the group to satisfy their self-oriented needs for dominance or status (Guetzkow & Gyr, 1954, p. 309).

Finally, procedural conflicts involve disagreements about the way meetings are run. They may also include disputes over routines and practices used to accomplish tasks (Putnam, 1986).

Affective and Substantive Conflict

Guetzkow and Gyr (1954) explored the effect of substantive and affective conflict on a group's ability to reach consensus. They found that groups that engaged in neither type of conflict--substantive or affective--tend to reach consensus (p. 372). The researchers identified conditions associated with high consensus in groups with either substantive or affective conflict.

Later, Bell (1979) measured the impact of substantive (rational) and affective (irrational) conflict on decision quality and group member flexibility in accepting others' ideas (p. 77). She found that individuals are more open to changing their original choices when the communication is highly substantive than when it is not. However, this flexibility did not result in significantly more correct solutions in the high-substantive conditions (p. 81). Therefore, high and low substantive conflict are reported as having no effect on decision accuracy.

These studies suggest that substantive and affective messages are typically reciprocated and that high affective conflict leads to procedural disagreements (Putnam, 1986, p. 183). However, substantive and affective messages appear to have minimal impact on decision quality.

Decision Rules

Decision rules constitute another area of work habit

research and are typically operationalized as majority rule or unanimous agreement (Putnam, 1986). Hall and Watson (1970) studied the effect of decision rules on group outcomes. Participants fell into one of two groups. Instructed group members received information to help them avoid win-lose and majority rule conflict-resolution strategies. These groups received directions for incorporating various ideas into a "group" decision. Uninstructed groups received no guidelines for making decisions or resolving conflicts that arose. Hall and Watson (1970) predicted and found instructed groups produced qualitatively better decisions, were more creative, and made more effective use of members than uninstructed groups.

In an attempt to understand the overlap between affective/substantive conflict and decision rules, Falk (1982) divided participants into three experimental conditions: majority rule, unanimity, and no decision rule. Majority rule groups were instructed to reach decisions through voting; unanimous groups were expected to reach a decision that all members agreed upon without voting; and those in the latter condition received no instructions in terms of the decision-making process employed. The research indicates that majority rule groups are more likely to engage in task or substantive conflict than unanimity and no decision rule groups (p. 1134).

These studies do little to clarify the effects of decision rules on conflict in groups. As Putnam (1986) puts it:

> Substantive conflict seems more frequent in majority rule than in unanimity groups, but the degree to which conflict hinders quality decision and member satisfaction hinges on the way in which groups use

decision rules to manage their conflict (p. 184).

Procedural Conflict

The area of procedural conflict in group decision-making has not been extensively explored. One of the most knowledgeable researchers in this area is Putnam who has found that group members can genuinely disagree over the modus operandi or set of procedures that a group adopts (Putnam, 1986, pp. 185-186):

> Some individuals have a strong need for tightly structured work environments with clearly defined goals, adherence to agendas, specific action plans and explicit deadlines. Others have a need to be flexible and free-wheeling by moving back and forth between agenda issues, operating from implicit plans of action between task and socioemotional activities and moving from topic to topic through a chain-association pattern. A mixture of members with diverse procedural preferences can lead to strong disagreements as to how the group should proceed. This controversy typically occurs in the early stages of a group's development and may lead the group to adopt a combination of the two extremes.

Putnam (1986) concludes that procedural conflict is not necessarily a result of substantive and affective disagreement. Members may hold differences of opinion as to how the group should conduct its meetings (p. 186).

Unlike cooperative-competitive literature, work habit research is less than unified. Hence, it is difficult to offer generalizations from this body of research. Further, it is not clear from the operationalizations of affective and substantive messages, when they create, manage, or resolve conflict. Instead, conclusions from these studies are limited to suggestions that sometimes groups use affective messages in their discussion; sometimes substantive and affective communication affect the group; sometimes they have no effect.

Yet another problem with the work habit research, which holds also for climate research, is that the majority of scholars instruct participants to behave in a particular manner--i.e., cooperate, compete, use majority rule, and so on. Although such suggestions may facilitate study construction and data collection, they limit the groups studied and subsequent results. There are groups that adopt competition over cooperation or majority rule over unanimous decision without being instructed. Research in which groups are instructed to communicate in one of these ways may not reveal much about natural processes.

Finally, as Putnam (1986) explains, individual members may vary in the way group meetings are run. Unfortunately, this has not been the focus of work habit studies although disagreements about procedures appear to be a more viable option for conflict and group decision-making research. It seems intuitively logical that these differences in decision rules, as well as differences in the issue facing a group, might serve as a source of competition and affective and substantive conflict. Putnam's (1986) suggestion is both enlightening and informative in that it identifies what may be the source of conflict in decision-making groups--differences or disagreements. Further, the starting point for linking conflict and group decision-making is not in studying how groups function under researcher-imposed constraints. A more informative approach explains the effect of conflict on decision-making groups and illustrates the manner in which groups manage disagreements as they try to make decisions.

Conflict in Groups: A New Agenda

Earlier, conceptualizations of decision-making were explored. An analysis of the term revealed conflict to be an accepted and expected component of decision-making. Additionally, there can be information that is inadequate or contradictory which can lead to conflict in the decision-making process (Janis & Mann, 1977). If this is the case, it seems that these differences, when perceived by decision-makers, can be expressed orally. Conflict, then, occurs when group members differ or disagree on some aspect of an issue facing the group and express these differences.

In addition to failing to resolve the dilemma about the effects of conflict on decision-making groups, the studies discussed failed to consider conflict as it occurs naturally in group decision-making. Again, the role of communication is not made explicit in most research linking conflict and group decision-making. Further, extant work in this area does not offer a complete picture of the types of strategies available to groups when managing disagreement. Clearly, there are a variety of possible responses to conflict. However, existing research sheds no light on either the possible or likely responses present during group discussion. What is needed is research that does not suffer from these inadequacies. As noted earlier, there are a number of possible responses to disagreement. Once the relationship between conflict and group decision-making quality is established, the next step becomes apparent: a descriptive exploration of the types of responses to disagreement in decision-making groups. If we are to understand and predict

outcomes, we must know more about the process that leads to them. Responses to disagreement should reveal something about outcomes because, as explained earlier, many of these disagreements require resolution or management before groups can move on to complete the decision-making task. This important question of how group members respond to disagreements is a question of strategy. That is, what strategies do decision-making groups use to manage differences or disagreements? The assumption is that such groups have, as a primary goal, reaching a conclusion or decision that all or most members accept. If this assumption is correct, it indicates that differences of opinion must be managed in some way so as to facilitate the end goal: a decision. Hence, the strategy for management of disagreement has a direct effect on the decision.

The Important Questions

The present discussion reveals a new direction for conflict and group decision-making theory and research. A more fruitful line of research would help dispel the confusion as to the promotive or disruptive nature of disagreement in group decision-making. Conflict literature is replete with descriptions of the strategies and tactics available to individuals engaging in interpersonal conflict. It is likely that decision-making groups have strategies that are unique to the decision-making process. This is, in part, likely because group decision-making requires the management or resolution of disagreements so that members may share perceptions and reach consensus. Hence, theory building in this area requires answers to questions about the strategies and

tactics most employed by decision-making groups, and the identification of new strategies and tactics, for example:

(1) What strategies and tactics do decision-making groups use to manage disagreements?

(2) Are there strategies or tactics for disagreement management in groups other than those discussed in existing conflict literature?

(3) What is the relationship between strategies and decision quality?

Again, these questions emerge as the most important issues that require attention if we are to understand the relationship between conflict and decision-making. In summary, while it is clear that much has been gained from the study of cooperative and competitive climates, work habits, and the like as they relate to conflict, important questions remain. Extant research in this area has failed to explain the positive or negative effects of conflict, nor has it revealed anything of the natural responses to disagreement.

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